DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 336 371 SP 033 284

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TITLE When the Teacher's Away...
PUB DATE Jul 91
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; *Incentives; Program Descriptions; School Districts; *Substitute Teachers; *Teacher Attendance; Teacher Effectiveness; *Training Methods

ABSTRACT

School districts across the country are developing information and special programs to assist substitute teachers. The following examples of such initiatives illustrate creative, often cost effective practices to improve the effectiveness of substitute teachers or to reduce the district's need for them: (1) Many districts have developed handbooks which are given to substitutes before they report. (2) Some districts have initiated inservice training workshops, such as those developed by the Houston (Texas) Independent School District and the Greenbrier (Arkansas) School District. (3) In many school districts the classroom teacher is involved through substitute teacher packets, buddy systems, and informing students about the regular teacher's expectations. (4) Districts in South Carolina and Arkansas use district administrators as substitutes. (5) The Bellevue (Washington) School District has introduced a school wellness program to promote healthy lifestyles among faculty, thus reducing absenteeism. (6) Districts with staff attendance problems have used monetary incentives and other types of recognition to promote good attendance. These and other like activities help to assure quality instruction and a stable learning environment even when the regular teacher is away. (AMH)

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WHEN THE TEACHER'S AWAY...

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July 9, 1991

SP 033 284

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WHEN THE TEACHER'S AWAY...

What's being done to encourage teacher attendance and to insure that meaningful instruction occurs when teachers are absent.

The increase in numbers of sick and personal days allotted to teachers combined with more time away from the classroom for professional development indicates that the number of days to be filled by substitute teachers is likely to increase. Because there is general agreement that time spent with substitute teachers is often nonproductive, schools are looking for ways to insure that their students are well served even during times of teacher absence. In districts across the nation, educators are developing needed information and special programs to assist their substitute teachers. Some districts, on the other hand, are using initiatives to reduce the number of teacher absences, thereby reducing the need for substitutes.

The following examples illustrate creative, often cost effective, practices which have been initiated by school districts to improve the effectiveness of their substitutes or to reduce their need for substitute teachers.

HOW SCHOOLS CAN ASSIST THEIR SUBSTITUTES

Provide Needed Information

Saundra J. Tracy (1988) believes that too often the substitute teacher is not given adequate information concerning policies and procedures. As a first step in addressing this problem, many schools are developing handbooks for their substitute teachers which contain such pertinent information as maps, a list of emergency procedures, expectations of the substitute teacher, school policies and procedures, and a school calendar.

Such handbooks, in order to be effective, need to be given to substitutes prior to the time they report. Ideally, handbooks could be distributed at a back-to-school orientation meeting for the district's substitutes. This could be a special program of general information followed by a question and answer session. If feasible and appropriate, schedule time to tour facilities or to drive past school buildings.

Initiate Training Programs

Since there is general agreement that substitute teacher work requires a different approach from that of the classroom teacher, many school districts are developing inservice training classes or workshop sessions to address special demands of substitutes. Depending on the size of the district and its available resources, such

training can be done through the use of an outside consultant, can be developed by a committee from the district working with a facilitator, or by the district alone.

An article by McIntire and Hughes (1983) describes the development of STEMs (Substitute Teacher Education Modules) which were used for several years in the Houston Independent School District. These modules included twenty, two-hour inservice training classes on such topics as communication skills, district policy, and instructional techniques (positive reinforcement, motivation, and behavior modification. Those who completed twelve of the modules and passed an exam were eligible for a $5.00 increase in their daily pay.

The Greenbrier (Arkansas) School District recently developed two-day training sessions for their substitute teachers. Working with a facilitator from the University of Central Arkansas, a Greenbrier committee composed of teachers and substitutes, identified and planned sessions based on substitute teachers needs. The sessions, which were presented collaboratively by faculty from Greenbrier and the University of Central Arkansas, included classroom management, instructional techniques, legal implications, and a teacher shadowing experience. In addition to the substitute teachers feeling better prepared and more a part of the "school family," the Greenbrier faculty received unexpected rewards from the increased communication and collaboration that occurred throughout the planning and presentation.

"Solutions..."

Even those districts that do not have the aid of a facilitator can develop their own training or draw from existing models. Geneva Cannon's "Survival Guide for Substitute Teachers" (1984) is a basic guide which offers practical suggestions for instruction as well as tips for effective management techniques. Such guides are becoming increasingly more commonplace in the educational market.

Involve the Classroom Teacher

If a district is making a commitment to improvement practices of substitute teachers, classroom teachers must be involved. A substitute teacher packet developed by each classroom teacher is invaluable. Such a packet should include emergency lesson plans, up-to-date seating charts, classroom "helpers," class rules and comment or evaluation forms for the substitute to indicate how things went. Going one step further, "buddy" teachers can be assigned to help locate needed items or to assist during an emergency situation.

Teachers can also assist substitutes by holding an informal discussion with their students to inform them about behavior expectations when they are absent. If students know teachers expect learning to occur even in the event of an unexpected absence, students' attitudes will be more cooperative.

"Solutions..."

"OTHER" SUBSTITUTES

Administrators as Substitutes

One way the Darling (South Carolina) School District "saved money and bolstered good teaching" was through the Superintendent's Substitute Teacher Program initiated in January 1989 (Grier and Creech, 1990). District administrators voluntarily serve as substitutes once each semester. The program has improved teacher morale--teachers now feel the administration is more empathetic to their problems. Grier states the next step is to invite the school board members and district legislators to sign on as substitutes also!

Using administrators as substitutes is not always done on a voluntary basis. In the Little Rock (Arkansas) School District, administrators are required to do substitute teaching. So far, the program has saved the district thousands of dollars and brought the expertise of seasoned educators into the classroom.

REDUCING THE NEED FOR SUBSTITUTES

School Wellness Programs

For those districts seeking to reduce their rates of teacher absenteeism, a school wellness program may be worth investigating. The Bellevue School District (Washington) has been successful in reducing staff absenteeism and the associated costs by 1) promoting healthy lifestyles, 2) boosting morale by taking health services to the

workplace, 3) improving on-the-job performance through inexpensive, convenient opportunities for exercise and weight loss (Oxrieder, 1987). A high percentage of the faculty participated in the exercise classes, blood pressure checks, cholesterol screenings, lectures on health related topics and other preventive programs. Oxrieder believes that the program is especially important in that it may have helped to save lives.

Pay Incentive Programs

For those districts with staff attendance problems, financial rewards and other incentives can be a means to improve teacher attendance. Freeman and Grant's report "How We Increased Staff Attendance by 16 Percent and Saved $165,000," (1987) discusses positive improvements in staff attendance through monetary incentives (savings bonds) and other recognition--letters of commendation and meritorious attendance plaques and certificates.

Summary

In his article, "The Plight of the Substitute Teacher," (1989) Kenneth Calkins writes, "There may be a tougher job in the school system than being a substitute teacher. If there is, however, no one has yet proved it." (p. 228) Although administrators can do their part to eliminate the need for substitutes by establishing wellness programs or using

pay incentives, the need for substitutes will always be part of the institution called school. However, improvements can be made in substitute teacher programs which will ensure a stable learning environment for students--even on those days the teacher's away.

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